

Building recording at Bluebell Farm, Earls Croome, Worcestershire



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Tim Cornah

Summary

Building recording was required to meet a planning condition relating to the redevelopment of historic agricultural buildings at Bluebell Farm, Earls Croome, Worcestershire.

The planning condition specified that the buildings should be recorded to English Heritage specified standards. This required photographing the exterior and interior of the building and annotating existing survey drawings. This produced has an archive before any changes were made to the building, which can be used for future research and management of this heritage asset.

An element of historical research and synthesis was also a condition planning approval. Original records relating to Bluebell Farm were studied at the county record office, along with historic maps and trade directories. Online census records were accessed along with digitised historic mapping, aerial photographs and other online sources.

Analysis of the buildings was based upon the recorded fabric and documentary research. The development of the buildings were reconstructed and illustrated on phased ground plans and elevations.

Bluebell Farm formerly consisted of a house with a broadly square farmyard to its south. The earliest elements of the farm may be the farmhouse itself, though this was not inspected in detail as it lay outside of the scope of the present project. It is, however, potentially contemporary with a former threshing barn which lies on the eastern side of the farmyard. The barn was not internally inspected as again it lay outside of the scope of the present project, however the bricks with which it was constructed and its overall style suggest an 18th century date.

The buildings proposed for development are a range of single storey brick and tile built agricultural buildings which broadly form a square around a yard. A further yard also existed to its south which was enclosed by these buildings to the west and a wall to the south, overall creating an F shape. The yards were accessed at three points through wide entrances suitable for carts. One of these is recognisable from the position of a gable facing onto the road with a corresponding gable facing into the northern yard. The western range of these buildings were hipped at the southern end and half hipped at the northern end, with gable on the eastern end of the northern range. The function of these buildings is largely consistent with animal husbandry and most likely for cattle. All of these buildings appear to be broadly contemporary and built within the middle of the 19th century, along with an extension on the northern end of the former threshing barn which appears to have been a stable with a hayloft above. This exception to this date is an extension added on the southern side of the central element which appears to have been added later that century. All subsequent alterations appear to have been made in the 20th century.

Report

1 Background

1.1 Reasons for the project

Recording of historic buildings was undertaken at Bluebell Farm, Earls Croome, Worcestershire (NGR 386509 241422). It was commissioned by BB Architecture and Planning Ltd, whose client intended to convert existing stables into three residential units, for which a planning application had been approved by Malvern Hills District Council (reference MH/11/0427).

The building is an undesignated heritage asset within the terms used by the *National Planning Policy Framework*. The building is also registered with the Worcestershire Historic Environment Record (HER; WSM45661).

The project conforms to the generality of briefs prepared by Worcestershire County Council for such projects and for which a project proposal (including detailed specification) was produced (WA 2015).

The project also conforms to the *Standard and guidance for the archaeological investigation and recording of standing buildings or structures* (ClfA 2014) and the *Standards and guidelines for archaeological projects in Worcestershire* (WCC 2010).

The event reference for this project, given by the HER is WSM67181.

2 Aims

The Chartered Institute for Archaeologists defines the aims of building recording as 'a programme of work intended to establish the character, history, dating, form and archaeological development of a specified building' (*Standard and guidance for the archaeological investigation and recording of standing buildings or structures*, ClfA).

3 Methods

3.1 Personnel

The project was undertaken by Tim Cornah (BA Msc); who joined Worcestershire Archaeology in 2006 and has been practicing archaeology since 2004. The project manager responsible for the quality of the project was Tom Rogers (BA, MSc).

Illustrations were prepared by Carolyn Hunt (BSc).

3.2 Documentary research

Prior to fieldwork commencing a search was made of the Historic Environment Record (HER) as well as the county record office.

3.3 List of sources consulted

Cartographic sources

- 1838 Tithe map
- 1886 Ordnance Survey map
- 1904 Ordnance Survey map

Documentary sources

Published and grey literature sources are listed in the bibliography.

3.4 Fieldwork strategy

A detailed specification had been prepared by Worcestershire Archaeology (WA 2015).

Fieldwork was undertaken on the 17th of August 2015. The site reference number and site code is WSM 67181.

Building recording consisted of a photographic survey of the interior and exterior of the buildings, analysis of their development, annotation of existing survey drawings and measured survey. All photographs were taken with photographic scales visible in each shot where possible. The photographic survey was carried out with a Sony α350 digital SLR camera. All photographs were recorded on a pro-forma Photographic Record Sheet. Annotation of existing ground plans (by Nigel J Teale) and elevations, and completion of pro-forma Building Record sheets complemented the photographic record.

The project conformed to the specification for a level 3 survey as defined in the English Heritage document *Understanding historic buildings: a guide to good recording practice* (EH 2006). This level of survey is described as 'an analytical record' comprising of 'an introductory description followed by a systematic account of the buildings origins, development and use' (EH 2006). This required the following elements of survey.

Survey and drawings

- Plans of all main floors and elevations as existing (provided by client).
- Measured drawings showing the form of any architectural or functional detail not more readily captured by photography.

Photography

- Overall appearance of rooms and circulation areas.
- Detailed coverage of the building's external appearance.
- Any detail, structural or decorative, relevant to the building's design, development and use, which does not show on general photographs.

3.5 Building analysis

Analysis of the building was based on the study of the photographic record, building recording forms and annotated drawings. It was also informed by the documentary sources listed above. This allowed plans to be drawn up showing the structural development of the building.

The building as recorded is depicted in Plates 1 to 34. Ground plans and phase plans have been reproduced as Figure 2.

3.6 Statement of confidence in the methods and results

The methods adopted allow a high degree of confidence that the aims of the project have been achieved.

4 Context

Bluebell Farm lies within the Severn Valley, on the eastern bank of the river and broadly within its floodplain. The geology of the area is of Branscombe Mudstone Formation with surficial deposits of clay, silt sand and gravel to the west of the farm.

Within a 500m radius of the site, the HER indicates archaeological deposits dating as far back as the Palaeolithic period (WSM56937). The record for human activity in the area becomes more tangible in the Bronze Age through to the Roman periods where cropmarks suggest enclosures typical of settlement (WSM01405, 22870, 24374). The area was primarily agricultural in the medieval period, as evidenced by ridge and furrow to the west and east (WSM10243, 15905, 24362).

It was within the post-medieval period that the current landscape was established. The farm is located on a junction on the road between Worcester and Tewkesbury, with Earls Croome to the

east and Upton upon Severn to the west. Whilst this road was clearly in use as a turnpike by the time of the 1838 tithe map, its origins are likely to be much older. The tithe map (Fig 3) shows a tollgate on the Tewkesbury to Worcester road, with what is likely to have been a toll house next to it.

The HER also records two further farmsteads within the area, the first being at Holly Green Farm to the south west (WSM48186), and Grove Farm to the south (WSM52403). Whilst Grove Farm is likely to date from the 19th century, the farmhouse at Holly Green may date to the 16th century. A field barn also formerly existed to the north-east of Bluebell Farm (WSM51276) and farmstead itself (WSM52401), which is suggested to be of 19th century date though with some of the buildings potentially dating to the 18th century (WSM45661).

The earliest detailed mapping of the site dates to the tithe map of 1838 (Fig 3), and shows a house with an enclosed farmyard to the south. The house is much smaller than that which stands currently and is aligned north to south with two rear wings. The house shown on this map appears to be consistent with the gable visible in Plate 32. The origins of the house are unclear, but the gable visible in Plate 32 may suggest an earlier date than many of the other buildings that make up the farm. The steep pitch of the roof is more consistent with the era before the classical revival of the 18th century though such a pitch was widely reintroduced in the 19th century with the Gothic movement. The gable end is raised above the roof line and has stepped endings. It is unlikely that such a small-scale building dates to the 17th century as brick was an expensive material at this time. Similar detailing to that seen here can be seen on the former Rectory at Earls Croome, a building which dates to 1707. This has a similar gable with stepped ends (Brooks and Pevsner 2007). It is possible that both of these buildings were constructed by the Croome estate.

A further building to the east of the farmyard, was a threshing barn, now converted into a dwelling, Plates 33 to 34. This was built with a similar steep pitched gable to that of the house and with bricks that are 2 inches wide. These bricks are often suggested to date to the 17th and 18th centuries and certainly date to before the brick tax of 1784. Though not closely inspected, the house appears to have been built with similarly thin bricks. It is possible that the house and threshing barn comprise the earliest elements of the farmstead and are contemporary. This is further supported by the fact that both the suggested oldest part of the house and the former threshing barn are both built on limestone sill walls, and that both are constructed using a stretcher bond with a header course every fourth course.

5 The building

5.1 Historical information

The farmyard shown on the 1838 map is similar in plan to that which remains. Despite the similarity, it is unlikely that these are the same buildings. The western wing is not shown as one consistent building line, and the northern wing does not extend as far east as that which is shown as Phase 1 in Figure 2. Similarly, the possible stable and hayloft extension on the north end of the threshing barn does not exist on this map. Although this could be of a different period to Phase 1, this is unlikely as the materials and techniques used are the same.

The northern farmyard corresponds much more closely with the 1886 Ordnance Survey map (Fig 4). The only exception to this is that the southern range to the west of the threshing barn is connected to the range to its west. The map also suggests that this range was of single width with only one roof ridge, where two remain. The position suggests that the northernmost of these is original, as would be consistent with Phase 1.

This dating is broadly consistent with the development of the model farm plans. The late 18th and into the 19th centuries, saw a period of farm redevelopment, often by landlords and estates, and often characterised by large-scale, single phase construction. This process often occurred alongside field enclosure (Lake 1989). The F-shaped layout seen here was common in the central and northern parts of the county, and typically existed on smaller farms. A similar E-shaped layout with double yards were closely associated with areas of planned reorganisation and enclosure with

the Severn and Avon Vales (Lake, Hathaway and Robson-Glyde 2014), a process which has occurred around Bluebell Farm although the date of this is unclear.

Five separate farmers are listed at Bluebell Farm in the trade directories between 1850 and 1900. These were Henry Horniblow in 1850 (Post Office 1850), George Brooke in 1868 (Post Office 1868), Thomas William in 1873 (Littleburys 1873), Mrs Berkeley in 1892 (Kellys 1892) and Benjamin Hall in 1900 (Kellys 1900). This fast turnover may suggest that they were tenant farmers rather than owners.

5.2 Building development

The phases as outlined below are illustrated on Figure 3.

5.2.1 Phase 1: Mid-19th century

This phase is characterised by the construction of planned buildings around two farmyards, in a broadly F-shaped pattern. The larger of the two yards was accessed from a cart entrance in its north-western corner which led onto the road (Plates 1–3), and a gateway to the east (Plates 4–5). This may have led towards the former field barn to the north-east. The central area of this courtyard was likely to have been used for the collecting and mixing of dung for manure.

The northern range of these buildings (Plates 6–8), was split up into six rooms, of which the central four would be consistent with loose boxes for rearing and fattening cows. This may be confirmed by the breaks in the division walls on the northern side, which may have contained a feed passage, a feature also consistent with the rearing of cows. These rooms all have individual doors and windows. It was more common in earlier buildings for cows to have minimal ventilation, but there was a trend from the mid-19th century into the early 20th century for windows to aid air movement (Lake, Hathaway and Robson-Glyde 2014).

One of these rooms was larger, had two doors and two windows, and was spanned by a queen post truss, which was supported with steel fixings (Plate 9). All other roof trusses above the room divisions had raking queen struts supporting the principle rafters (Plate 10). As with all other trusses or woodwork, no carpenters marks were seen. Carpenters marks were used to locate specific joints in a very specific location, and their absence would suggest that these trusses were made off-site to a pattern. This may further suggest an off-plan design for the whole complex. All the timbers used for the roof trusses were of softwood and are likely to have been spruce, apart from those within the southern range which were constructed from larch. The only hardwood timbers recorded were the two posts leading into the cart entrance (Plate 2), and these may have been elm, though oak is also possible. Many of the timbers seen were converted using a circular saw, the first patent for which did not exist until 1777, but came into more common usage throughout the 19th century. The timber saw marks on these timbers (Plate 11), suggest that the timbers were converted from the round by vertically aligned band saws and then converted further into quarters by small diameter circular saws. This practice was not uncommon in the first half of the 19th century and continued into the 1840s when much larger circular saws, sometimes 5 foot in diameter, became common (Jones and Simons 1961).

The two rooms at either end of the northern range (Plates 13–15) are less obvious in function though feed rooms to serve the feed passage seem likely. Other such farms of this era had specific rooms for the processing of root crops for use as fodder.

On the western side of the farmyard (Plates 16–18), there was a further room accessed by four doors into the yard and a wide entrance into the yard. This room was spanned by five further queen post trusses. The function for this area is unclear but may have contained further, now removed, loose box partitions.

On the southern side of the yard the range formerly connected the western range with the former threshing barn (Plate 19). The interior of this has been much changed so little can be clearly stated about its original function, but it was accessed by a door next to the barn and a further in the northern elevation. A milking parlour is likely to have been required, but such an interpretation for

this space is speculative. This space was spanned by three king post trusses (Plate 20) made from larch, which may be original but are more likely to be later additions given their different material and construction. Only the northern wall of this range can be said to be original.

To the south of this was a secondary yard, which had a wide gate in its southern side through a contemporary wall (Plate 21), and was bounded to the western range, (Plates 22–23). Here the western range comprised one room spanned by five further queen post trusses, and was accessed at its western end by wide double doors such as would be suitable bringing carts and machinery through (Plate 24). However, it had four doors and windows facing west, so animal shelters may also be envisaged. A further door and window also faced into the southern range.

Although not surveyed in detail as part of this project, the two-storey structure on the northern end of the former threshing barn is likely to be of the same phase, as it was built of the same brick type (Plates 25–26). The wider doors on the west and east sides may be consistent with stabling. This may be supported by doors into a possible hayloft above on the eastern side an arrangement often seen with stables. Its half hipped gable end also has two further doors at ground level (Plate 27). An interpretation such as tack rooms may be possible.

5.2.2 Phase 2: Early 20th century

The Ordnance Survey maps of 1904 (not reproduced for copyright reasons) and 1928 (Fig 5) shows the southern range as being under a single roof line, rather than under a double (Plate 28). The date of the construction of this addition to the south is hard to ascertain as the bricks used on its west and south walls were reused from the earlier building, but were not keyed into the Phase 1 structure to its north. This rectangular extension was spanned by five further softwood queen post trusses (Plate 29), though of a slightly different construction to those used in Phase 1.

5.2.3 Phase 3: later 20th century

The later 20th century was characterised by numerous breeze block partitions, particularly in the buildings around the northern yard which were converted into to stables. The easternmost room of the northern range was also partitioned into a tack room and feed room, and the individual stables extended across the feed passage.

The southern range was again changed greatly internally by the insertion of a new wall plate running longitudinally between the Phase 1 and 2 structures (Plate 31). This was supported by further breeze block divisions which created both store rooms and stables.

The southern end of the western range was also split to create further stabling.

6 Discussion

Bluebell Farm in its entirety gives a picture of the development of farming within this area of the county from the post-medieval periods into the modern era. Whilst the exact date of the earliest surviving farmstead buildings cannot be established, it potentially dates to as early as around 1700 as shown by both the former farmhouse which has stylistic similarity to the former rectory built in 1707 in Earls Croome. This similarity may also suggest the influence of the Croome estate at this time. The presence of a threshing barn which displays similar materials and techniques to the house, suggests arable farming was originally the predominant rural economy within this period. This is typical of the eastern side of the Severn Valley (Lake, Hathaway and Robson-Glyde 2014).

A wider movement took place throughout the later 18th and into the 19th century in improving farms, focussing on increasing production. This is often characterised as large-scale, single phase rebuilding, similar to that seen here. At Bluebell Farm, this appears to have taken the form of a pastoral farming economy, particularly focussed on cattle. The buildings recorded here show a number of features including feeding passages and feed preparation rooms, all centred on a central yard which would have stored manure. A potential stable with hayloft above was also inserted at this time. These buildings were sometimes built on set designs, a situation which seems to have been the case here.

The techniques used and the form of these buildings suggests a date in the middle of the 19th century, this is confirmed to some degree by the cartographic evidence despite not being entirely conclusive.

This set of buildings underwent further changes within the latter half of the 20th century when it was converted into a stable yard, as it has remained. This was mainly characterised the division of a number of spaces to form stables, as well as the major changes to the southern range between the two yards.

6.1 Research frameworks

Farmsteads have been the subject of extensive study with general information assessments including *Traditional farm buildings of Britain and their conservation* (Brunskill 2007), *The English Model Farm* (Wade Martins 2002) and *Historic Farm Buildings* (Lake 1989). More detailed studies of particular areas have also been carried out including *The development of farm buildings in Western Lowland Staffordshire up to 1880* (Peters 1969). Whilst these sources provide a framework for reference, they are not specific to the Worcestershire area.

The Worcestershire Historic Farmsteads Project, part of a country-wide English Heritage project to categorise farm buildings, has recently been completed and has allowed farmstead sizes and layouts to be tied to the landscapes in which they sit, for example (Lake, Hathaway and Robson-Glyde 2014). These allow comparison between farms in Worcestershire to take place and to identify areas where further research is needed.

7 Publication summary

Worcestershire Archaeology has a professional obligation to publish the results of archaeological projects within a reasonable period of time. To this end, Worcestershire Archaeology intends to use this summary as the basis for publication through local or regional journals. The client is requested to consider the content of this section as being acceptable for such publication.

Recording of a historic building was undertaken at Bluebell Farm, Earls Croome, Worcestershire (NGR 386509 241422). It was commissioned by BB Architecture and Planning Ltd, whose client intends to convert existing stable buildings into three residential units.

The remaining buildings of the historic Bluebell farm suggest a largely arable farming economy, potentially dating from as early as around 1700. This farm may have had links to Croome estate at this time, as suggested by the architectural detailing of the farm house when compared to the former rectory within the village.

The buildings recorded within this project document the period of agricultural improvement that started in the late 18th century. This is characterised by a single phase set of buildings constructed in the mid-19th century that focused on a pastoral economy, particularly in the husbandry of cows. These buildings are not untypical of the period.

8 Acknowledgements

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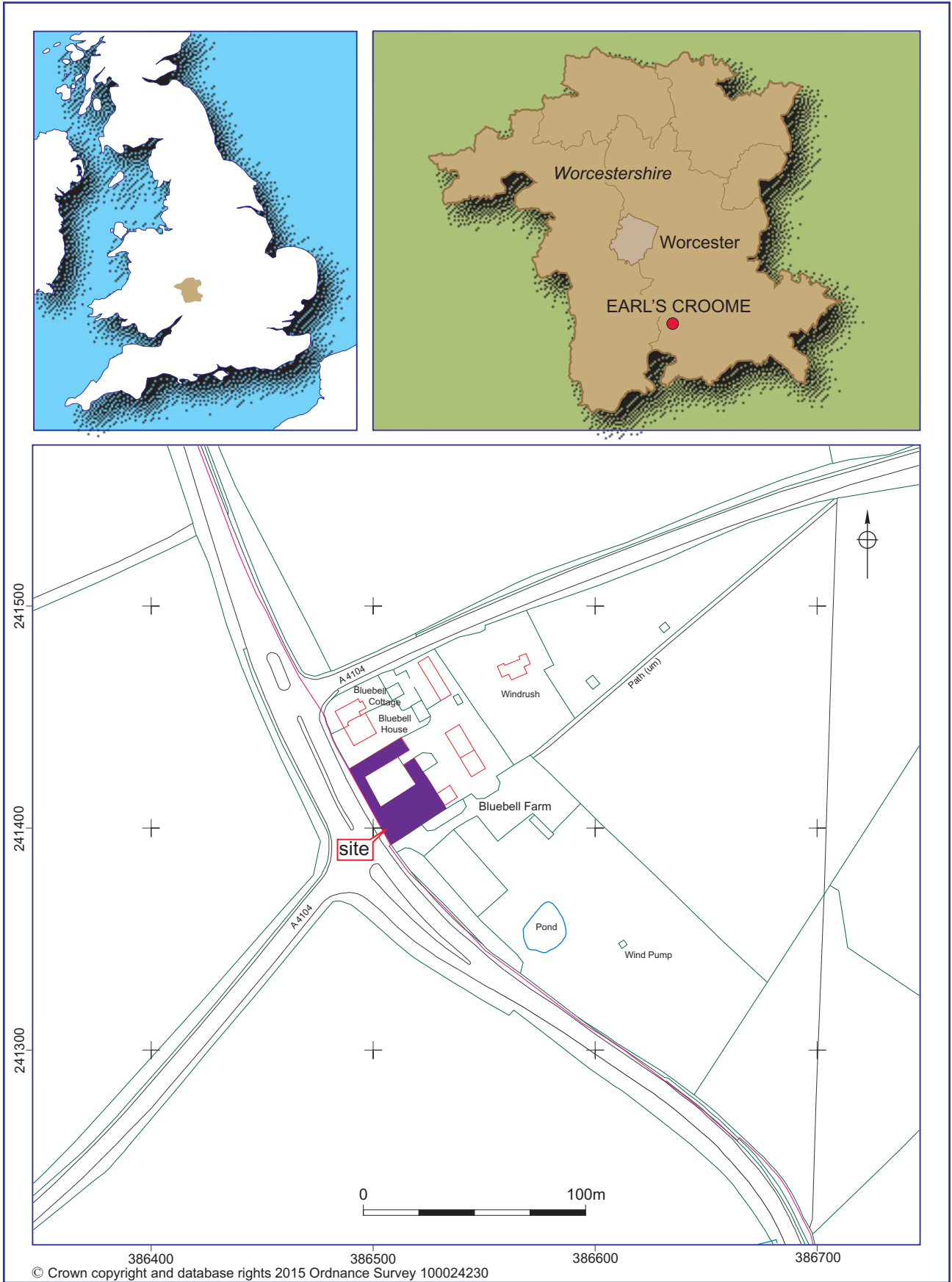
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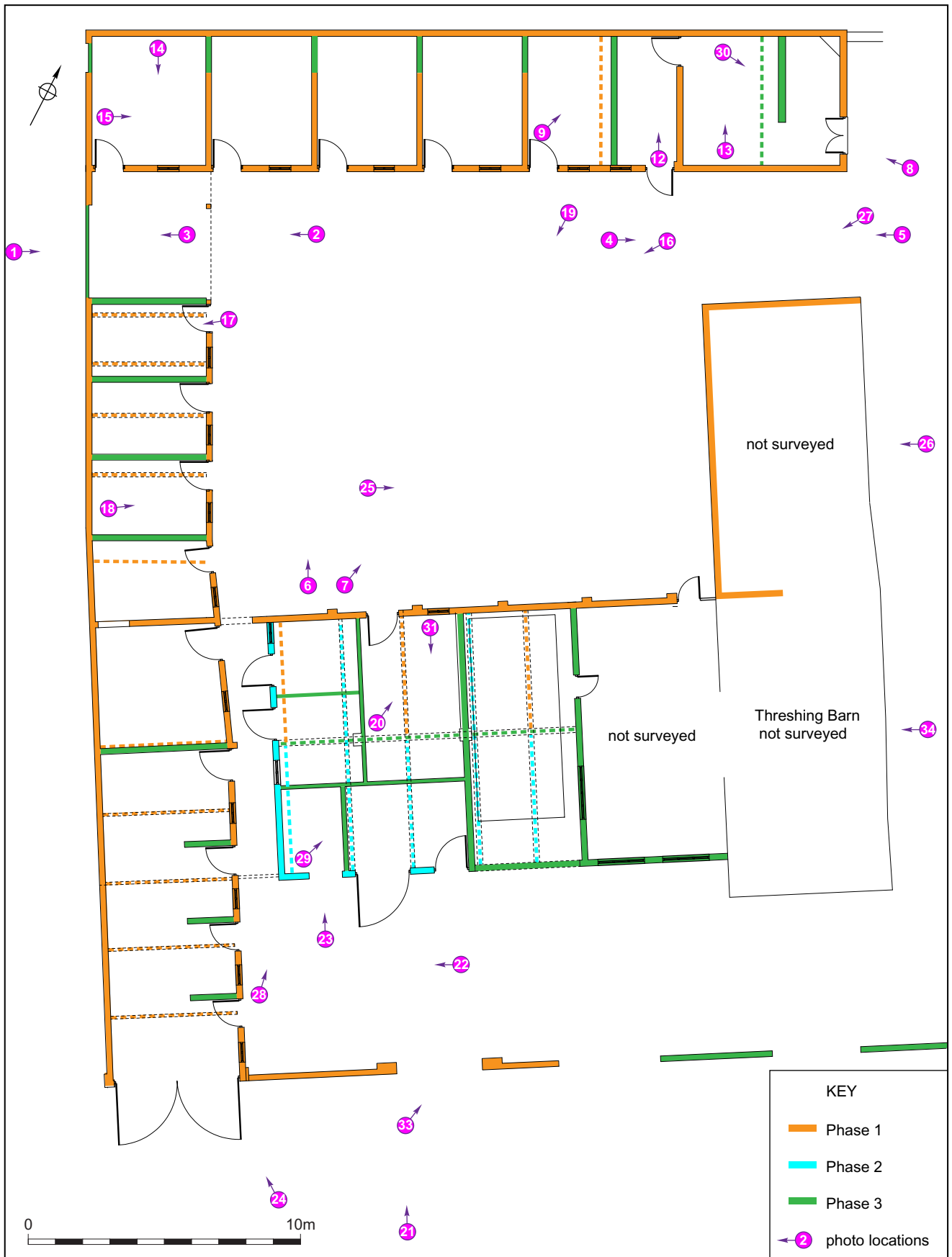
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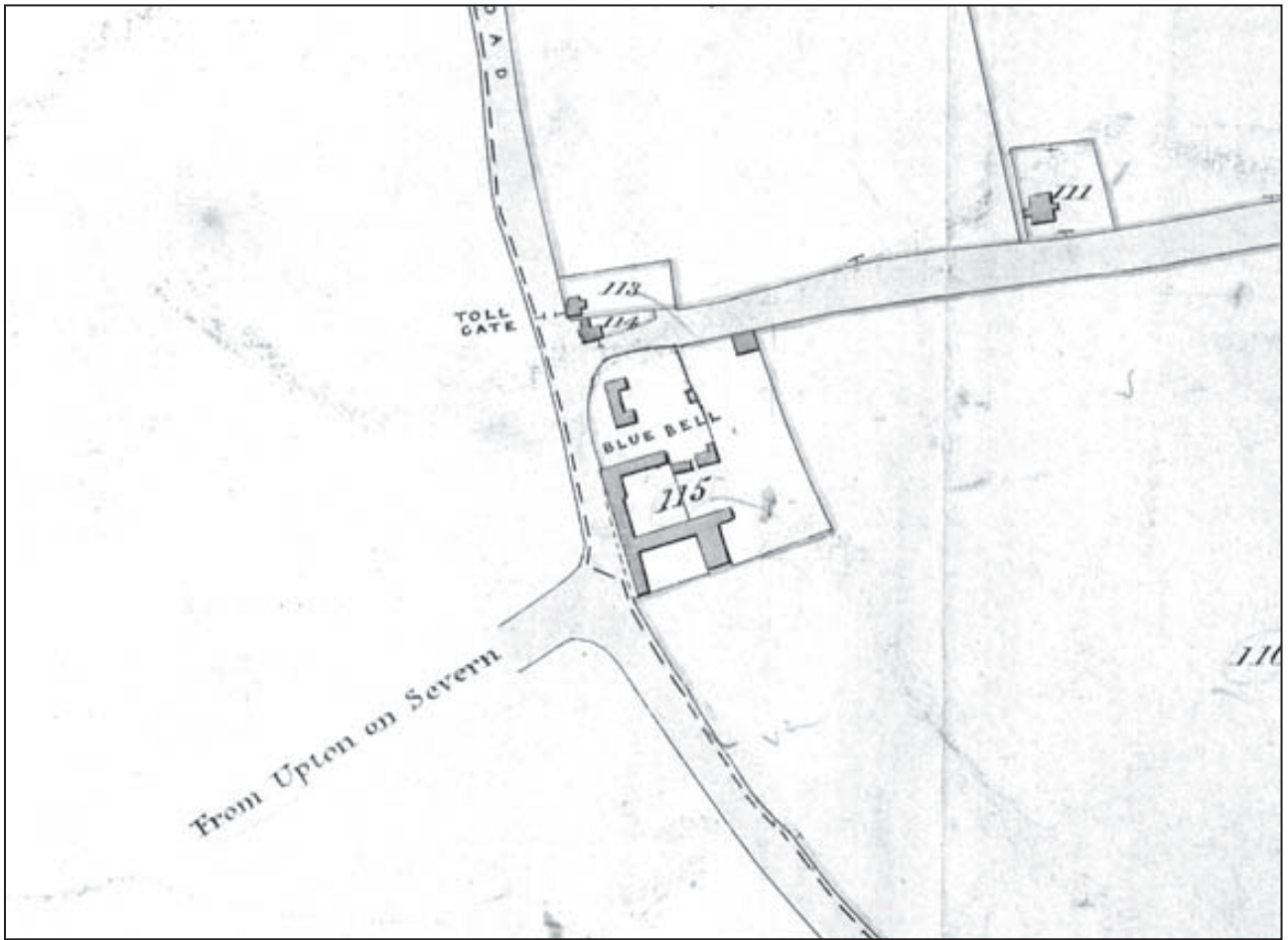
Location of the site

Figure 1



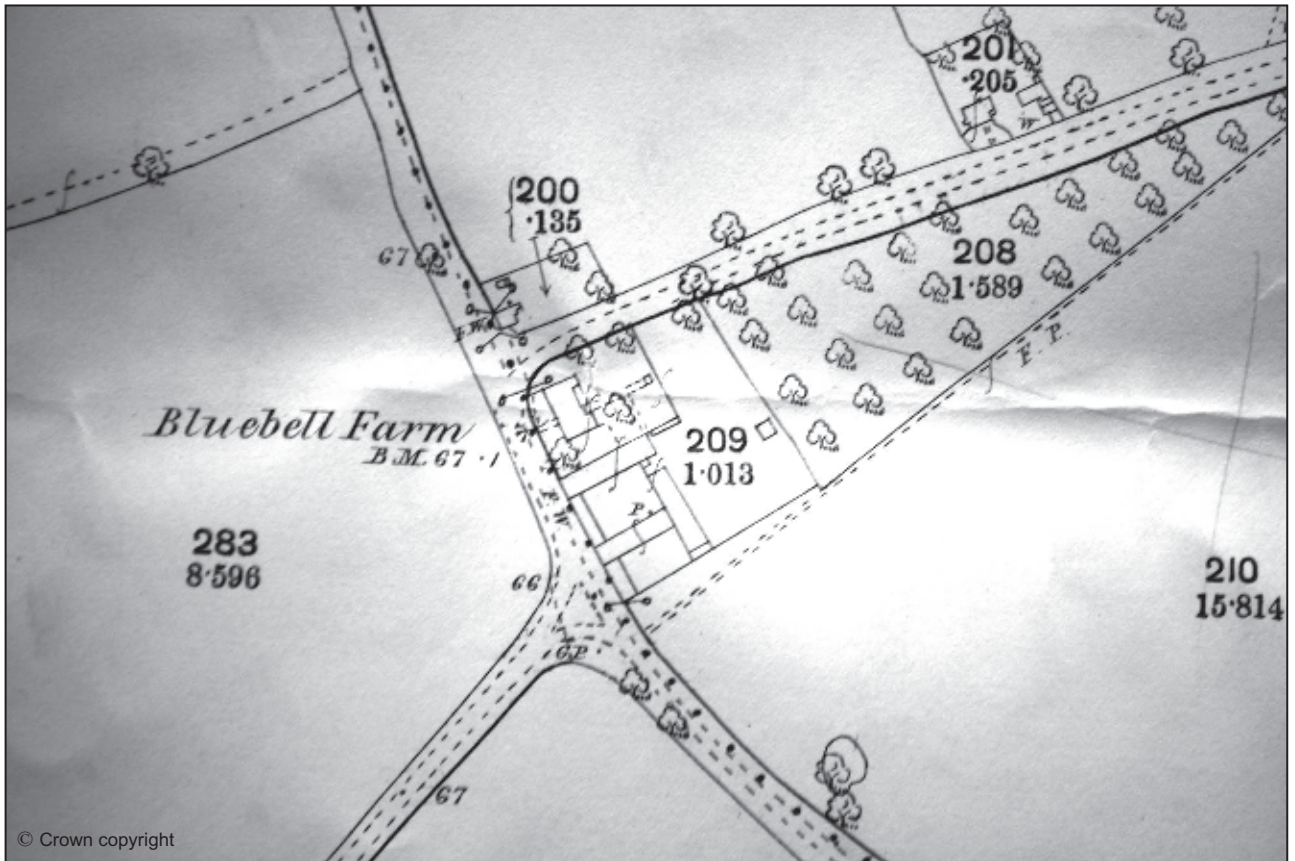
Phase plan and photo locations (based upon Nigel J Teale Drg No 3337a)

Figure 2



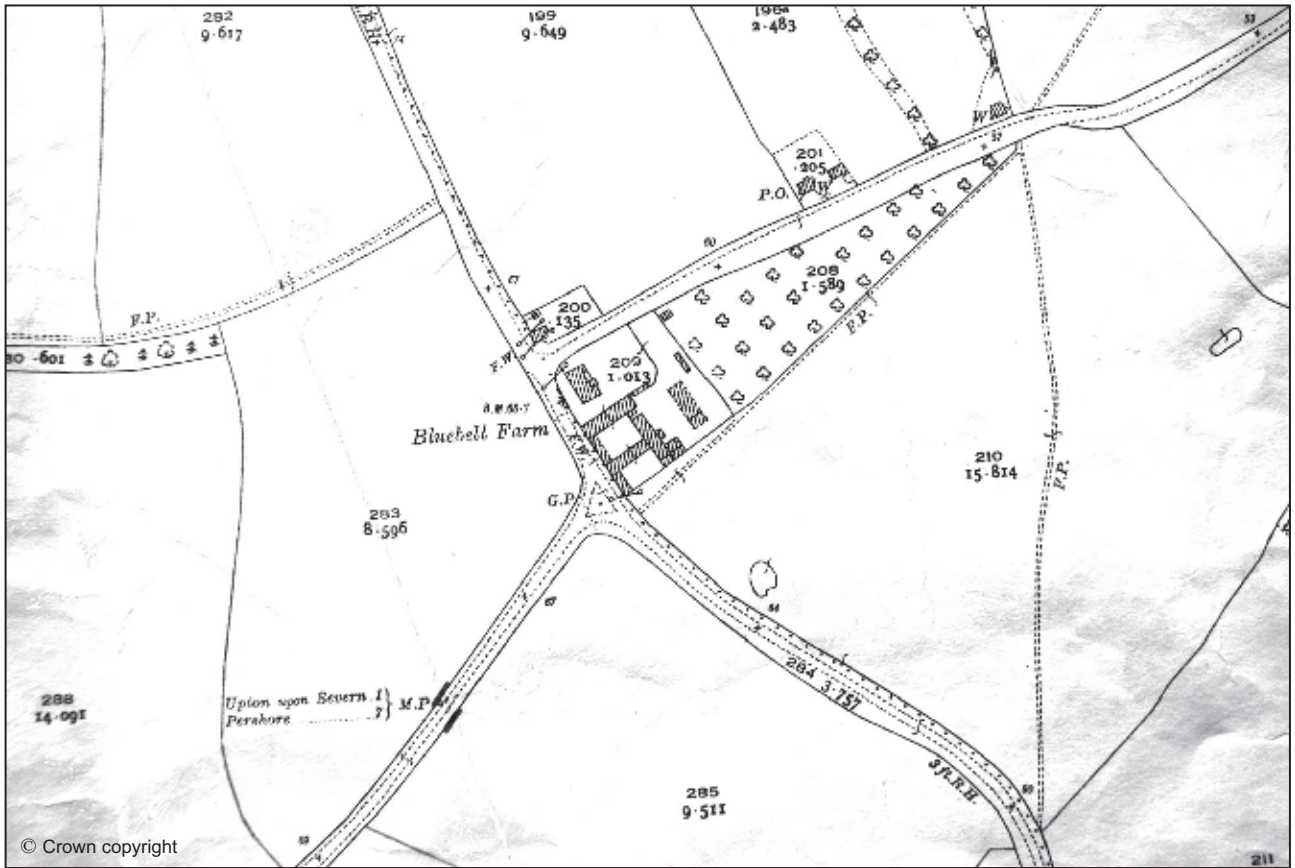
Extract from 1838 tithe map

Figure 3



Extract from 1st edition OS, 1886

Figure 4



Extract from 1928 OS map

Figure 5

Plates



Plate 1. Blocked cart entrance, looking east



Plate 2 Blocked cart entrance, looking west

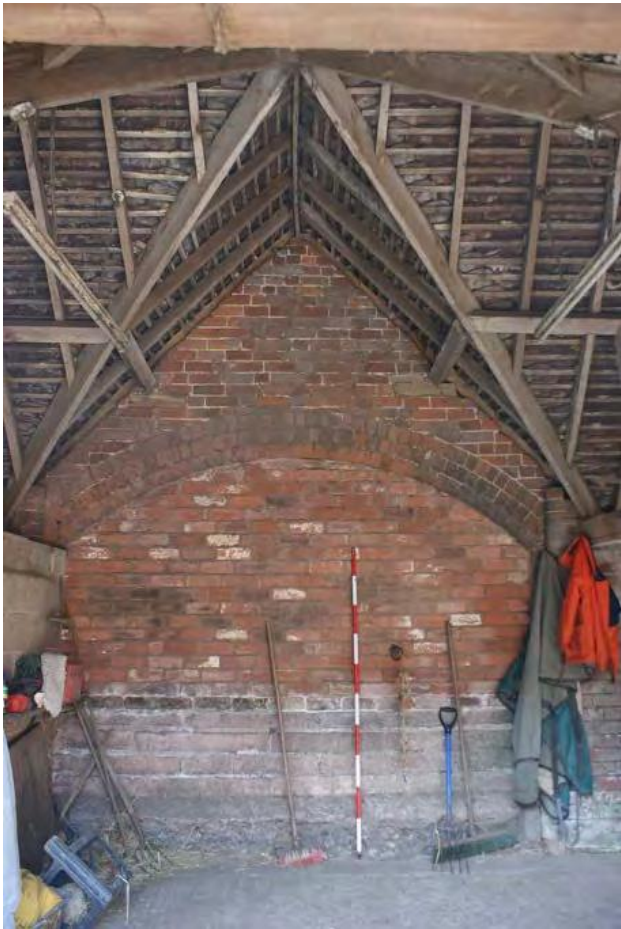


Plate 3 Blocked cart entrance, looking west



Plate 4 Gateway, looking east



Plate 5 Gateway, looking west



Plate 6 Northern range, looking north



Plate 7 Northern range, looking north-east



Plate 8 Northern range bale end, looking north-west



Plate 9 Northern range interior, looking north-east



Plate 10 Northern range interior, with blocked feeding passage on the left, looking north-east



Plate 11 showing evidence of the conversion techniques used on the timbers



Plate 12 Northern range interior, looking north



Plate 13 Northern range interior, looking north



Plate 14 Northern range interior, looking north



Plate 15 Northern range interior, looking east



Plate 16 Western range, looking west



Plate 17 Western range interior, looking west



Plate 18 Western range interior, looking east



Plate 19 Central range, looking south



Plate 20 Central range interior, looking north-east



Plate 21 Southern yard and southern range, looking north



Plate 22 Western range, looking west

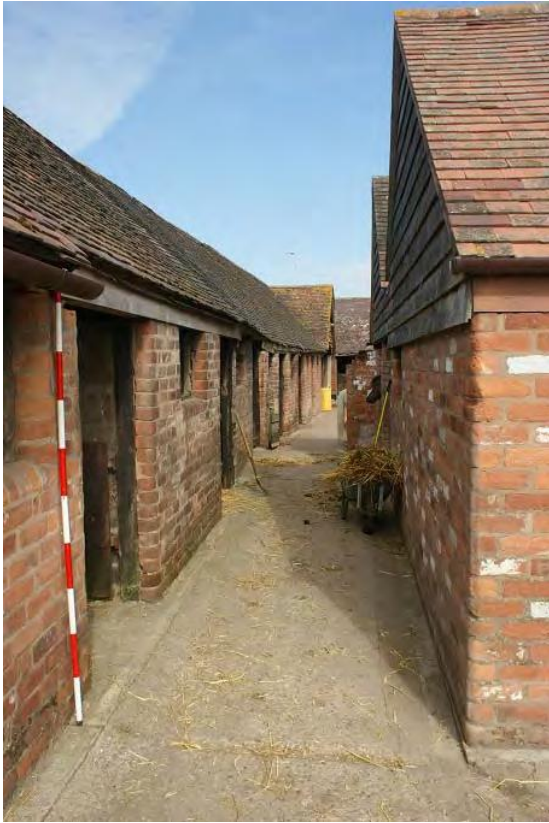


Plate 23 Western range, looking north



Plate 24 Western range, looking north-west



Plate 25 Former stable and hayloft, looking east



Plate 26 Former stable and hayloft, looking north-west



Plate 27 Former stable and hayloft, looking south-west



Plate 28 Southern range, looking north-east



Plate 29 Interior of southern range, looking north-east



Plate 30 Interior of northern range, looking south-east



Plate 31 Interior of southern range, looking west



Plate 32 Gable end of former farmhouse, looking south-east



Plate 33 Southern range and former threshing barn, looking north-east



Plate 34 Former threshing barn, looking west